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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the diversity of experiences associated with grandparenting, as well as identifying factors that contribute to this diversity. The focus is grandparents in Canada, but international research is included as well. Following a list of highlights and an introduction, the paper addresses: (1) the demographic context of grandparenthood (e.g., what factors influence whether individuals will become grandparents?); (2) meanings associated with grandparenthood; (3) contact, help, and emotional closeness (e.g., how much contact do grandparents and grandchildren have with each other?); (4) sources of diversity in grandparent-grandchild relationships (e.g., geographic proximity, gender, age, race, and health); and (5) expectations and rights of grandparents. Contains 95 references. (EV)

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GRANDPARENTHOOD IN CANADA

Carolyn J. Rosenthal, Ph.D.
McMaster Centre for Gerontological Studies, McMaster University

and

James Gladstone, Ph.D.
School of Social Work, McMaster University

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The Vanier Institute of the Family was established in 1965 under the patronage of Their Excellencies Governor General Georges P. Vanier and Madame Pauline Vanier. It is a national voluntary organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of Canada's families through research, publications, public education and advocacy. The Institute regularly works with businesses, legislators, policy-makers and program specialists, researchers, educators, family service professionals, the media and members of the general public.

About the author

Carolyn J. Rosenthal, Ph.D., is Professor of Gerontology and Sociology and Director of the McMaster Centre for Gerontological Studies at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario. She has been studying aging families for 20 years, with a particular interest in relationships among older parents, adult children, and grandchildren. She has served as Social Sciences Editor of the Canadian Journal on Aging, and is the incoming Editor-in-Chief of that journal. Her publications include, *Aging Families : Have Current Changes and Challenges Been 'Oversold'?* in E. Gee and G. Gutman (eds.), The Overselling of Population Aging: Apocalyptic Demography, Generational Challenges and Social Policy, Oxford University Press, 2000.

James Gladstone is an Associate Professor in The School of Social Work at McMaster University. He is especially interested in the intergenerational family and the relationship that families have with larger systems.

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Most older Canadians (76% of those aged 65 and older) have grandchildren, and most have more than one. Among older Canadians who have children, almost all (90%) also have grandchildren.

- First-time grandparenthood is a mid-life event, not an event of later life. Canadian couples typically become grandparents in their late 40s or early 50s.

- Today's grandparents live longer and experience a longer duration of grandparenthood than ever before. Many grandparents live into their grandchildren's adulthood.

- The majority of grandparents have regular contact with their grandchildren.

- When grandchildren are young, contact between grandparents and grandchildren is mediated by the middle generation. Canadian studies have found that between two-thirds and three-quarters of older people who have children see a child at least once a week. Most of these see their young grandchildren as well.

- A national survey of Canadians aged 15 and older found that among Canadians with a grandparent still alive, almost 40% saw their grandparent more than once a month.

- Grandparents participate in various types of activities with their grandchildren and are resources to them in both material and nonmaterial ways. Grandparents bestow gifts, serve as babysitters, pass down history, traditions, family and social values, and act as confidants and role models.

- Grandparents may also provide support to their grandchildren indirectly. By offering emotional or material support to adult children, grandparents may reduce the overall stress in the family, thereby influencing the well-being of their grandchildren.

- Studies of grandparent-grandchild relationships report that most grandparents have positive feelings towards their grandchildren, although they often have a special grandchild to whom they feel particularly close.

- Several factors have an impact on emotional closeness and on the interaction between grandparents and grandchildren. These factors include: geographic proximity, gender, whether the grandparent is a maternal or paternal grandparent, age, lifestage, and timing of grandparenthood, marital and employment status, race and ethnicity, grandparents' relationships with their own grandparents, and health and functional status.

- Since the 1980s, there has been an increasing number of grandparents who have taken on a parental role with their grandchildren. Reasons include an increase in alcohol and drug abuse, divorce, teen pregnancy, incarceration and the AIDS epidemic in the middle generation.

- Society has provided grandparents with few guidelines as to how to position themselves in various family situations. There are few books or courses available to help grandparents develop a sense of competency in their role.

- The rights of grandparents to have contact with grandchildren has emerged as an issue when grandparents are denied access by their children or children-in-law. In Canada, several advocacy and self-help groups have been formed, including the GRAND (Grandparents Requesting Access and Dignity) Society, the Canadian Grandparent rights Association, and Orphaned Grandparents.

INTRODUCTION

Grandparenting is a complex social process experienced in a wide variety of ways. Grandparenting can be a heartwarming, disappointing, or even irrelevant experience for those who are involved. The purpose of this paper is to examine the diversity of experiences associated with grandparenting, as well as to identify factors that contribute to this diversity. Our focus will be on grandparents in Canada. However, as Canadian research is limited, we will also draw on other international literature.

Our approach towards understanding grandparenting is rooted in a particular perspective on social relationships. According to this perspective, people attach meanings to their experiences through a process that both shapes and is shaped by their social behaviour. Thus, we believe that grandparenthood carries different types of meanings for grandparents, and that this is reflected in the feelings that grandparents have towards their grandchildren, as well as the way that they interact with them. We also suggest that there are structural and situational factors that help to give rise to the personal meanings and behaviours associated with grandparenting. Our view is that an appreciation of grandparenthood needs to place grandchildren and adult children, as well as grandparents, into the analysis. Finally, we see grandparenting as a dynamic and fluid process that may shift in form or meaning at different points in time. We address these points in detail below. Our starting point, however, is to set the demographic context.

THE DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT OF GRANDPARENTHOOD

What factors influence whether individuals will become grandparents?

Whether individuals eventually experience grandparenthood depends on several factors related to the individuals themselves: how long they live, whether they have had children, the age at which they had children, and how many children they had. As well, whether and when individuals become grandparents depends on the fertility patterns of their children.

How long they live...: Increases in life expectancy over the course of the 20th Century mean that, in contrast to the past, most Canadians live long enough to experience grandparenthood. Indeed, most Canadians now survive well beyond the usual age of becoming a grandparent. Gee (1987) notes that, of 1,000 persons born in 1831, approximately one-half survived to age 45 and substantially less than one-third to age 65. Of people born in 1901, about two-thirds survived to age 45 and about one-third to age 65. In sharp contrast, of people born in about 1980, almost all (over 93%) are expected to survive to age 45 and about three-quarters to age 65. As is well known, women have greater survivorship than do men.

Whether they have children....: Although we hear much about an increase in childlessness, most Canadians have children, and therefore have the potential to become grandparents. Most older Canadians (82%) have children, and most have more than one. In 1990, Canadians aged 55 and older had an average of three surviving children (Gee, 1995:93). Over the 20th Century, childlessness decreased from 15% among women born at the beginning of the century to a historic low of 7%-8% among women born 1927-1936 (the women who helped produce the Baby Boom). Rates of childlessness have risen in recent years; some scholars (Gee, 1987; Grindstaff, 1984) predict that they will reach 15 to 20%, although the precise rate cannot be determined until today's young women reach the end of their childbearing years.

The age at which they have children....: Although recent decades have seen a delay in when women have their first child, in historical perspective this is a return to the pattern seen at the beginning of the 20th Century. The median age at which Canadian women have their first child has actually changed only slightly over the course of this century. Among women born in 1911-1915, the median age at first birth was 29.3 years. This dropped to a low of 23.5 years for those born in 1941-45. The median age then gradually increased, until for women born in 1961-65 it was once again 29 years (Rajulton and Ravanera, 1995: 125-6). Although economic downturns affect fertility patterns, Gee speculates that it is likely that a class phenomenon is involved as well: "...the people who are delaying childbearing are the well-educated, successful middle class -- a highly visible and publicized minority" (Gee, 1987:279).

In contrast to patterns for age at first birth, age at last birth has declined steadily and dramatically over time. Women who were born in the middle of the 19th century had their last child when they were about 40, while women born in the middle of the 20th century (1951-1960) had their last child when they were about 26. The major factor contributing to this pattern is the decrease in the number of children people have, combined with a childbearing pattern in which couples have children early in marriage and space them closely (Gee, 1987). The relevant point with respect to grandparenthood is that parenthood and grandparenthood are experienced sequentially, rather than simultaneously as was the case in the past; today, active parenting (as defined by having children at home) and grandparenting typically do not overlap (a point discussed more fully below).

How many children they have....: The more children one has, the more grandchildren one is likely to have. Canadian fertility, however, has declined substantially. This can be seen by looking at the average number of children ever born to three different age cohorts of women, all

of whom had completed their fertility by 1991 when the data were collected. Women aged 65-69 in 1991 had an average of 3.36 children; among women aged 55-64, the average was 3.31, and among women aged 45-54 the average was 2.56. The average for women aged 35-44 was 2.02; this figure will rise somewhat, however, since these women had not yet completed their fertility (Statistics Canada, 1993:7). Averages can be misleading since they are affected by "outliers" -- in this case, a decline in the percentage of women having many children. Connidis (1996) examined trends in family size over the 30-year period, 1961-1991. The first trend is a decline in the percentage of women having no children, only one child, and five or more children. Second, there was an increase in the percentage of women having two or three children. Third, a substantial proportion of families continued to have large families -- four or more children. Connidis concluded that most ever-married people would have at least two or more children for some time to come. Rajulton and Ravanera (1995:127) conclude from their analysis of the 1990 General Social Survey of Canada, "The norm of two children per family seems now to be established. Once the first child arrives, the second follows soon after.." These studies lead to the conclusion that, in the next few decades, most ever-married Canadians will have the opportunity to become grandparents and most will in fact experience grandparenthood.

How likely is it that children will have grandparents alive?

Most young children have grandparents. In 1991, over 90% of 10-year-old children in North America had at least one living grandparent (McPherson, 1998:209). Children are more likely to have grandparents alive today than in the past. This increased likelihood is made apparent in the work of Ellen Gee (1990) who compared the proportion of three Canadian birth cohorts having a surviving parent at age 50 and 60 (the point here being that these parents are

very likely to be grandparents as well). She found that, among Canadians born in 1910, only one-third of 50-year-olds had a surviving parent. This rose to almost half of those born in 1930 and is expected to rise to 60% of those born in 1960. The likelihood of having a surviving parent at age 60 has increased from 8% of people born in 1910 to 16% for those born in 1930, and is predicted to rise to 23% for those born in 1960.

How common is grandparenthood?

According to a survey conducted in 1991 (McDaniel, 1994: 113), most older Canadians (76% of those aged 65 and older) have grandchildren, and most have more than one. Twenty-nine per cent of older Canadians have two to four grandchildren, 25% have five to nine, and 18% have 10 or more. Only 5% have only one grandchild. Among older Canadians who have children, almost all (over 90%) also have grandchildren (Connidis, 1989). Recent trends in fertility among today's young adults may result in slightly lower percentages of people experiencing grandparenthood in the future, but it seems apparent that most people will still have grandchildren. They may, however, have somewhat fewer, on average, than today's older adults, as a result of the changing fertility patterns discussed earlier.

Stepgrandparenthood is an experience about which there has been little research but which is a fairly common experience. People become stepgrandparents through divorce or death and subsequent remarriage in either the grandparent or parent generation. In the U.S., Szinovacz (1998) reports that almost two fifths of couples who have adult children have at least one stepgrandparent relationship in their family. Comparable Canadian information is not available. Since divorce rates are lower in Canada than in the U.S., having (or being) a stepgrandparent

may be somewhat less common in Canada. Nonetheless, it is likely that a substantial minority of children and older adults have this type of relationship.

At what age do people become grandparents?

First-time grandparenthood is a mid-life event, not an event of later life. Contemporary Canadian couples typically become grandparents in their late 40s or early 50s (Gee, 1991). Is grandparenthood occurring earlier than in the past? Gee concludes that, among Canadians, grandparenthood occurs at an earlier age than it did in the early 1900s, although some American scholars suggest the age at which adults first become grandparents has remained fairly constant over the course of this century (Hagestad, 1985; Sprey and Matthews, 1982). This disagreement may reflect differences between Canada and the U.S. or it may be that Gee's analysis, which used more recent data, captures more current patterns. Recent trends for some women to postpone childbearing might create the impression that there is a corresponding trend toward a later transition into grandparenthood. This may be the experience of some middle-aged adults, but to date the average for age of entry into grandparenthood does not indicate such an overall trend.

Does grandparenthood overlap with other roles and responsibilities?

There is one important way in which the timing of grandparenthood differs from what it was in the past; compared to the past when women had children through more of their childbearing years, today active parenting and grandparenting are less likely to overlap (Connidis, 1989; Hagestad, 1985). This means that today's grandparents have more time to devote to grandchildren. Grandparenthood typically occurs when parents are in the "empty nest"

stage of family life, although it should be noted that in one Canadian study (Gee, 1991), a surprisingly large minority of women (45.5%) became *first-time* grandmothers while they still had dependent children. Thus, about half the women in the study became grandmothers while they were in the "empty nest" stage of family life and their children were grown up, while the other half were both grandmothers and mothers of dependent children simultaneously. With the birth of each successive grandchild, however, women would be less and less likely to still have dependent children at home.

Since first-time grandparenthood occurs in mid-life, most men and women are married when this event occurs (Gee, 1991), and indeed may be married during the early childhood years of some if not all of their grandchildren. Later on, of course, most grandmothers will be widowed. As well, most men and many women are employed in the paid labour force when they first become grandparents. In Gee's study, about 42% of women were employed at the time of the birth of the first grandchild. This percentage is almost certain to grow in the coming years, since we may expect more women in mid-life to be in paid employment (based on patterns among younger women today).

Do people think there is a "right time" to become grandparents?

Gee's (1991) study found that, when asked about the "right age to become a grandmother," there was a clear difference between grandmothers and non-grandmothers in the likelihood of stating a "right" age (about two-thirds of women who were grandmothers stated an "ideal" age, compared to only about half of women who were not grandmothers). Among women who stated a "right age", the ideal age was between 48 and 52, depending on whether or not they were already grandmothers; those who were not grandmothers gave a higher age.

Does grandparenthood extend over a longer period of life than in the past?

Today's grandparents -- and especially grandmothers -- live longer and experience a longer duration of grandparenthood than did their counterparts at the turn of the last century. Because people become grandparents in mid-life, as discussed earlier, many grandparents live into their grandchildren's adulthood. In a study of intergenerational family structure in seven economically developed nations, Farkas and Hogan (1995) found that more than half of people aged 65 and over have a grandchild who is at least 18 years old. McPherson (1998:209) reports that in 1991 about 75% of 20-year-olds had one living grandparent. This increased overlap of lives opens up opportunities for grandparents and grandchildren to develop and maintain adult relationships, and to share the grandchildren's transition to marriage and parenthood.

Women experience more years in the grandparent role than men do, since (1) they have greater life expectancy, and (2) they become parents and hence grandparents at a younger age than men. Women experience some years as grandmothers while married, and some while widowed, whereas men tend to be married throughout their grandparenthood experience.

What will the future hold?

While it is always perilous to make social forecasts, it is fairly safe to say that future cohorts of women will experience first-time grandmotherhood under different conditions than today's grandmothers. It is less safe, however, to say what the impact of these conditions will be. Among mothers who helped produce the Baby Boom, we may expect a larger proportion to become grandmothers (since they had high fertility) and a younger age at first-time grandmotherhood (given their young age at first birth). At the same time, their transition to

grandmotherhood will be affected by the characteristics of their children, the Baby Boomers, who have higher rates of childlessness, lower rates of marriage, and who are more likely to have children at later ages. We can therefore speculate that mothers of the Baby Boom will be less likely than their immediate predecessors to be engaged in simultaneous parenting and grandparenting, as well as more likely to be divorced when they become grandmothers and more likely to be working in paid employment (Gee, 1991). In speculating on grandparenthood in the future, a final point bears mention. In Canada, more and more children – about one-half in Quebec and about one-third in Canada as a whole – are born to parents who are not legally married. This means that a substantial minority of people now become grandparents through the common-law or co-habiting relationships of their children.

MEANINGS ASSOCIATED WITH GRANDPARENTHOOD

Several early studies discussed the types of meaning that are associated with grandparenthood. Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) categorized various meanings of grandparenthood into five groups. Some grandparents view grandparenthood as a form of "biological renewal," an opportunity to recapture their youth. Others stress the importance of "emotional self-fulfillment," whereby they hope to be better grandparents than the way they perceive themselves as parents. Some grandparents consider themselves as "resource persons." Grandparents may try to "accomplish vicariously" through their grandchildren what they could not achieve when they were younger. Finally, some grandparents feel "remote" and distant from their grandchildren.

Kivnick (1983) identified other ways of attaching meaning or significance to grandparenthood, noting that grandparents may attach more than one type of meaning to their

grandparenthood. Being a grandparent can take a position of "centrality" for grandparents whose lives revolve around those of their grandchildren. Grandparents may view themselves as a "valued elder," whose role is to pass down family history and traditions and to be able to provide grandchildren with sound advice when needed. Grandparents may derive feelings of "immortality through clan," whereby their personal and family line is continued into the future through their grandchildren. "Reinvolvement with personal past" refers to grandparenthood as a way of reliving one's own past, including experiences with one's own grandparents. Finally, grandparents associate grandparenthood with "indulgence" and an opportunity to pamper and be more frivolous with grandchildren than one was with one's children.

Johnson (1983) asked grandmothers to describe a typical grandparent, as well as their own preferred type of grandparent. The typical grandmother was portrayed as one who was not only seen as "old-fashioned," but as old. Conversely, the preferred type of grandmother was viewed as someone who is fun-loving, youthful, and having minimal responsibilities or authority over grandchildren. These grandmothers would have a life outside of their grandparenting role and their involvement with grandchildren would be optional and mutually gratifying.

CONTACT, HELP, AND EMOTIONAL CLOSENESS

How much contact do grandparents and grandchildren have with one another?

The majority of grandparents have regular, if not frequent contact with their grandchildren (Baydar & Brooks-Gunn, 1998). When grandchildren are young, contact between grandparents and grandchildren is mediated by the middle generation. In 1990, 7% of Canadian adults who did not co-reside with their mother saw their mother daily, 34% saw her at least once a week, and 23% at least once a month. It is reasonable to infer that in cases where these adults

have young children, their children will have somewhat similar rates of contact with grandparents. When contact is studied from the perspective of adults aged 65 and older, rates of contact appear higher. Some Canadian studies have found that between two-thirds and three-quarters of older people who have children see a child at least once a week (Connidis, 1989:46; Rosenthal, 1987). In a national survey, when people were asked to think about the child they saw most often, 57% said they saw that particular child at least once a week and another 21% said at least once a month (McDaniel, 1994:117).

These patterns are strongly affected by distance. The closer a child lives to a parent, the more likely it is that they will see their parent on a regular basis. In 1990, among Canadians who lived within 10 km of one of their parents, 80% saw their parents daily or at least once a week. Among those living between 11-50 km from their parents, 52% had daily or weekly contact. Among those living 51-100 km away, however, this proportion dropped to 23% (McDaniel, 1994).

Contact between adult grandchildren and grandparents can be studied taking the adult grandchild or the grandparent as the point of reference. Looking first at contact from the point of view of the adult grandchild, McDaniel (1994), based on a national survey of Canadians age 15 and over, reports that among Canadians with a grandparent still living, 39% saw their grandparent more than once a month and 41% less than once a month. Another 20% had not seen their grandparents in the 12 months prior to the survey. Young adults (aged 15-24) reported seeing their grandparents more frequently than did older adults in the survey. When asked about contacts with grandparents by telephone or letter, 3% of Canadians had daily and 13% had weekly contact of this type. A further 22% had contact by telephone or letter on a monthly basis,

while 33% said they had this type of contact less than once a month. 29% of Canadians reported no contact with grandparents by phone or letter in the 12 months prior to the survey.

Rosenthal (1987) looked at contact between grandparents and adult grandchildren from the perspective of the grandparent. In her study, grandparents aged 70+ were asked how often they saw any adult grandchild (defined as aged 18+). About two-thirds of older adults reported seeing an adult grandchild once a month or more, and one third saw an adult grandchild as often as once a week or more.

What do grandparents do for grandchildren?

Grandparents participate in various types of activities with their grandchildren and are resources to them in both instrumental and symbolic ways. Grandparents bestow gifts, serve as babysitters, provide recreation by playing games and telling stories, pass down history, traditions, family and social values, and act as confidants, role models, validators, and sources of information about the outside world (Brussoni & Boon, 1998). Grandparents represent stability and continuity, thereby easing the adjustment of grandchildren following the death or marriage breakdown (Gladstone, 1988) of their parent. When a child must be removed from the family home by child welfare authorities, a possible placement resource is the home of the grandparent (Laird, 1979). The successful development of children who are in poor health or born with disabilities can be aided by grandparents who provide positive attention and much needed support to their grandchildren (Berns, 1980).

One of the most common ways in which grandparents help their children and grandchildren is to help out with child care. (Note, however, that the great majority of grandparents do not want to provide full-time child care; Norris and Tindale, 1994:69). A 1990

survey asked Canadians how often they provided unpaid help with child care to people outside their household. While the question was not restricted to helping care for grandchildren, if we look at responses from persons aged 45 and older, we can assume that much of the child care reported would be care for grandchildren (since the children of friends and siblings would tend to be old enough not to require child care; see Fletcher, 1991). In 1990, 36% of Canadian women aged 45-54 said they provided unpaid help with child care. This rose to 42% of women aged 55-64, and then fell to 22% among women aged 65 and over. The comparable figures for men were 17%, 28%, and 14%. The majority of men and women who helped with child care did so at least once a month or more often. It should be noted that these figures are for the population as a whole. If we looked only at Canadians who had grandchildren and whose grandchildren lived within reasonable distance, the percentages of grandparents providing help with child care would be higher.

Grandparents also provide help to adult grandchildren. Rosenthal (1987) investigated the exchange of assistance between older people (aged 70 and over) and their adult grandchildren (aged 18 and older). Although rates of assistance were much lower than those for older parents and adult children, nonetheless about half of the older adults in the study reported giving help to adult grandchildren in the year prior to the study. Ten types of help were studied. The most commonly reported types of help given by grandparents to adult grandchildren were financial (23% of grandfathers, 22% of grandmothers), advice (20% and 18%), and emotional support (20% and 16%)

Grandparents may also provide support to their grandchildren indirectly. By offering emotional or material support to adult children, grandparents may reduce the overall stress in the family, thereby influencing the well-being of their grandchildren (Denham & Smith, 1989).

Finally, grandparents may be resources to the family, not only because of help provided on an ongoing basis, but because they can be called upon in times of emergency. Hagestad (1985), for example, refers to grandparents as the "family national guard," while Troll (1983) calls grandparents the "family watchdogs" who may not provide regular assistance, but who quickly become mobilized when they sense a family need. Rosenthal (1987) suggests that grandparents may be viewed as a "reservoir" of potential assistance from which help can be drawn if and when the need arises. This is similar to Hagestad's (1985) suggestion that just "being there" for grandchildren is a very important function of grandparents. Bengtson (1985) suggests that simply by "being there" grandparents may act as mediators of or deterrents to family disruption. Their presence may help provide a sense of family continuity.

What do grandchildren do for grandparents?

Grandchildren may provide companionship, help alleviate loneliness, and keep grandparents in touch with changing cultural values and new trends. Grandparents may derive pleasure from grandchildren's accomplishments and satisfaction from having helped their grandchildren materially or nonmaterially (Neugarten & Weinstein, 1964). As well, grandchildren often make grandparents feel young again, and may provide a sense of continuation of their blood line (Johnson, 1983). Johnson (1983) asked grandmothers in her study what they received from their grandchildren and found that the majority described their greatest pleasure in terms of "love." Grandparents do not necessarily look to grandchildren as a source of practical help, although there is some evidence that they expect grandchildren to help if a crisis occurs and that grandchildren feel an obligation to help under such circumstances (Robertson, 1976). Rather than expecting tangible help, grandparents expect affection and

attention (Norris and Tindale, 1994:71; Barranti, 1985; Langer, 1990). The few studies that have focused on adult grandchildren suggest that the grandparent-grandchild relationship remains affectionate (Hodgson, 1992), and that older grandchildren are anxious to be involved in their grandparents' lives and are willing to provide emotional support and tangible help (Troll, 1985).

Although tangible assistance from grandchildren to grandparents is not common, some grandparents do receive this type of help from grandchildren. Although little research has examined this topic, it is likely that it is older grandparents who need tangible help from children and grandchildren. In 1995, 62% of older Canadians received some kind of help with household work and other personal chores. Among those who got help, 12% said they got help from a grandchild (Statistics Canada, 1997: 32)). In the study by Rosenthal (1987), referred to earlier, about half the older adults in the study reported receiving help from adult grandchildren in the year prior to the study. The most commonly reported types of help received from adult grandchildren were help with personal services (20% for both grandfathers and grandmothers), household chores (17% and 22%) and home repairs (10% and 14%). Seventeen per cent of grandfathers received help with emotional support, compared to 8% of grandmothers.

Norris and Tindale (1994) observe that while grandparents provide help for their adult children and grandchildren, healthy, comparatively young, and well-off grandparents receive little tangible aid in return. What grandparents expect, rather, are affection and attention (Barranti, 1985). Norris and Tindale suggest, "Grandparents seem to take the long view, helping the younger generations whenever necessary and 'banking' this help for their own future needs (Norris and Tindale, 1994:71; Ingersoll-Dayton and Antonucci, 1988).

How do grandparents and grandchildren feel about one another?

Studies of grandparent-grandchild relationships usually report that most grandparents have positive feelings towards their grandchildren, although they often have a special grandchild to whom they feel particularly close (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1985; Fingerman, 1998). Similarly, most adolescent and young adult grandchildren have been found to have positive feelings towards their grandparents (Brussoni & Boon, 1998; Van Ranst, Verschuereq & Marcoen, 1995), with one grandparent appearing as the favourite (Matthews & Sprey, 1985).

One Canadian study (Boon and Brussoni, 1996) examined emotional closeness between young adult grandchildren (university students) and their grandparents. Subjects were asked to respond in terms of the grandparent to whom they felt closest. Maternal grandmothers were chosen as the closest grandparent more often than any other type of grandparent. The second most common choice, although a rather distant second, was paternal grandmothers, followed by maternal grandfathers and paternal grandfathers. (The study did not ascertain whether subjects actually had grandfathers alive, and this may have affected the lower likelihood of grandfathers to be selected as "closest"). More than half the grandparents lived at a substantial distance from the grandchild -- either in another province or another country, while about one-third lived in the same city. In this study, distance was unrelated to emotional closeness. In analyzing what factors were related to emotional closeness, the authors found that the perceptions the young adults had of their closest grandparent's views about their relationship was very important. In particular, the extent to which adult grandchildren believed their grandparent valued the contact they had was a good predictor of the "affectional tenor" of their relationship with the grandparent. Grandchildren who felt close to their grandparent perceived the grandparent as more influential in their lives than those who did not feel close, and had more frequent and varied contact with the grandparent;

they saw their grandparent more often in person, spoke to them on the telephone more often, and shared a broader array of joint activities with their grandparent. The most common joint activities were social activities such as attending family gatherings, visiting friends and relatives, dining out, and playing cards and games (Brussoni and Boon, 1998).

We have little information about how adult grandchildren in Canada feel their grandparents have influenced their lives. In the study described above, grandchildren were asked to think about how the grandparent to whom they felt closest had influenced their personal values or beliefs. Family ideals, moral beliefs, and the work ethic were most commonly reported as having been influenced by the relationship with the grandparent (Brussoni and Boon, 1998). Very few adult grandchildren in this study felt their relationship with their closest grandparent had been an important influence on their beliefs about sex or politics. When asked about the benefits they received from their relationship with their grandparent, the most frequently cited benefit was a sense of family history, followed by unconditional acceptance, insight into the aging process, helpful advice and wisdom, and help in understanding parents. "The more young adults believe they share strong, emotionally fulfilling relationships with their closest grandparents, the more they perceive their closest grandparent as an influential force in their lives" (Brussoni and Boon, 1998).

While it is clear from research that, in general, grandparents and grandchildren have strong and supportive relationships, this overall pattern masks enormous variation. One important factor, missing from our discussion in this section, is the relationship between the grandparent and his/her adult child, and the "mediating" role played by the middle generation. This and other sources of diversity in the grandparenthood experience are discussed in the next section.

SOURCES OF DIVERSITY IN GRANDPARENT-GRANDCHILD RELATIONSHIPS

While the majority of grandparents and grandchildren feel close to one another and interact with each other in various ways, grandparent-grandchild relationships are also characterized by diversity (Bengtson & Robertson, 1985). Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985), for example, identified different styles of grandparenting amongst grandparents with adolescent grandchildren. Grandparents may be "detached," having little contact with their grandchildren; "passive," having regular but superficial contact, or "active," having a great deal of involvement in the lives of their grandchildren. Indeed, several factors influence the many different ways that relationships between grandparents and grandchildren are experienced. We will highlight four sets of factors: social factors, health of the grandparent, mediating role of the adult child generation, and situational factors in the family.

How do social factors contribute to diversity in grandparent-grandchild relationships?

Several social factors have a direct or indirect impact on emotional closeness and on the interaction between grandparents and grandchildren. These factors are: geographic proximity; gender and lineage (that is, the maternal line or the paternal line); age, life stage, and timing of grandparenthood; marital status and employment status; race and ethnicity; and grandparents' relationships with their own grandparents.

Geographic Proximity

Numerous studies have found that contact between grandparents and grandchildren is influenced by geographic proximity. Grandparents who live closer to their grandchildren have greater opportunities to see their grandchildren and to interact with them (Cherlin & Furstenberg, 1986; Fischer, 1983). This, in turn, leads to greater closeness when grandchildren are young;

moreover, this closeness generally persists when grandchildren become adolescents (Matthews, 1983). Hodgson's (1992) study shows that geographic proximity continues to be related to contact when grandchildren reach adulthood. Many grandchildren in Hodgson's study also reported that feelings of emotional closeness are interwoven with opportunities for face-to-face contact.

Grandparents typically live close to at least some of their grandchildren, but it is rare for them to live in the same household. Among Canadians, there is a well established pattern of and preference for adult generations to maintain separate households. As a result, households containing both grandparents and grandchildren are rare. According to an estimate based on data from the 1996 Census of Canada, 2.7% of all Canadian households include family members from three generations (Vanier Institute of the Family, forthcoming). This household structure appears to be very slightly more common in the U.S. Szinovacz (1998) reports that in the U.S. 3.3% of adults live in households with grandchildren and 4.7% live in households that include three or more generations. Among adults who are grandparents, 26% of Black grandmothers compared to only 7% of White grandmothers lived in such households. In most households with grandchildren, the grandparent is the householder (82% among White grandparents in the U.S. who co-reside with children). Typically, the adult child in this situation is a daughter who is not currently married, although it is not uncommon for this type of household to include neither of the grandchild's parents.

While we lack data that directly address how close Canadian grandparents live to their grandchildren, we do know how close they live to their children. This information may serve as a proxy for proximity to grandchildren. Although many people have the impression that we live in a society in which families are widely scattered, over half of Canadians over age 15 who do not

live with one or both parents live within 50 km of them, and of these most live within 10 km of a parent (McDaniel, 1994). It should be noted, however, that 15% to 23% live beyond 1,000 km. When the distance issue is examined from the perspective of older people, data indicate that older people tend to live quite close to at least some of their children. When asked how close they lived to the child with whom they had the most contact, about half of all older Canadians said they lived within 10 km of that child and another 22% lived within 11-50 km (McDaniel, 1994). Most older people have more than one child, and while they live near at least one child, they may have other children living at a greater distance. For example, one Canadian study (Rosenthal, 1987) found that among adults aged 70 and over who had children, only 11% had no children living within one and one-half hours' travel time. Of the remainder, excluding those who still had dependent children at home and those who had only one child, 42% of the people in the study said all their adult children lived within 1.5 hours' travel time, while 58% said some children lived within that distance and some farther away. In other words, having all of one's children live far away is uncommon, partial dispersion is the most common pattern, and no dispersion beyond 1.5 hours' travel time is the pattern for a substantial minority. It seems reasonable to extrapolate from these findings that, by the time all of an individual's children have reached the end of their childbearing years, some grandchildren will be nearby and others more distant; such patterns, however, remain to be documented.

Gender and Lineage

Men and women experience family life in different ways, and grandparenthood is no exception. Capturing and conveying these differences is not easy, and efforts to do so run the risk of reducing complex experiences to a rather trivial series of "facts." Having acknowledged this,

we nonetheless may identify some gender differences in grandparenthood. Some were noted in the demographic section: women live longer than men and therefore experience grandparenthood over a longer period of time; women become parents at an earlier age than men and thus become grandparents at an earlier age as well; women typically outlive their husbands and therefore spend some years as "single grandparents." Grandmothers may attach different meanings to the grandparent role than do grandfathers (Kivnick, 1982).

The type of assistance grandparents give grandchildren appears to be somewhat patterned by gender. In a study conducted by Thomas (1986), grandfathers were more likely to give advice to their grandchildren than were grandmothers. Hagestad (1985) also found grandfathers in her study offered advice to grandchildren about instrumental issues, such as getting an education, finding a job, and managing finances. Grandmothers, on the other hand, had a wider range of topics that they discussed with grandchildren, including interpersonal issues, such as friendships and family relationships. Hagestad suggested that some of these differences may be related to the particular cohort to which the grandparents belonged, implying that grandparents born in different historical periods may adopt different styles of grandparenting. Similar comments have been made by Gee (1991), whose Canadian study led her to conclude that the transition to grandmotherhood is influenced by social and historical effects.

In North America, the mother-daughter tie tends to be stronger than any other parent-child tie. This would lead one to expect grandmother-granddaughter ties to be stronger than other combinations. Research, however, does not support this expectation. Looking first at the gender of the grandchild, several studies have found that relationships between grandmothers and granddaughters were not significantly different in terms of warmth or positive feelings than those between grandmothers and grandsons. (Matthews, 1983; Silverstein and Long, 1998; Hartshorne

and Mancaster, 1982; Van Ranst, Verschueren and Marcoen, 1995). The gender of the grandparent, on the other hand, does makes a difference according to some studies. For example, Roberto and Stroes (1992), in a study of young adult grandchildren, found that both granddaughters and grandsons perceived their relationships to be stronger with grandmothers than with grandfathers. Grandchildren interacted more with their grandmothers and felt that grandmothers had a greater influence on the development of their values than did grandfathers. In contrast, however, a Belgian study of adolescent grandchildren (Van Ranst, Verschueren and Marcoen, 1995) found no differences in feelings that grandchildren had towards grandmothers or grandfathers.

Grandparent-grandchild relations are also patterned by lineage. The term "lineage" refers to the line of descent. Because of the primacy of the mother-daughter relationship in North American kinship systems, kinship relations tend to be stronger along the maternal as opposed to the paternal line. One would expect this "tilt" towards the maternal line, tends to "advantage" maternal grandparents. (For example, daughters have more frequent contact with their mothers than do sons, and this might enable maternal grandmothers to see their grandchildren more often than do paternal grandparents.) Research on this is not plentiful, but there are indications that grandparent-grandchild relations are closer on the maternal side. Matthews (1983) reported that the majority of young-adult grandchildren whom she studied felt close to their maternal grandmother, followed by their maternal grandfather, paternal grandmother, and paternal grandfather, respectively. Similarly, Van Ranst, Verschueren and Marcoen (1995) found that grandchildren in their study felt emotionally closer to their maternal grandparents than to grandparents on their paternal side of the family.

Age, Life Stage and Timing of Grandparenthood

Matthews and Sprey (1984) have stressed the need to consider both the ages of grandparents and grandchildren when analyzing the nature of their relationships. They point out that being a grandparent to a 5-year-old is quite different from having a teenager or a 25-year-old as a grandchild.

Troll (1980) found that 50-, 60-, and 70-year-old grandparents had more positive feelings towards grandparenthood than those in their 40's or 80's. Troll suggested that the younger grandparents in her study were less able to relate to grandparenthood because they had not perceived themselves as being ready for grandparenting (see below regarding timing of grandparenthood), while the older grandparents may have had difficulty coping with the high energy level of their grandchildren. Neugarten and Weinstein (1964) found that older grandparents were more likely to have "formal" roles, while younger grandparents were more likely to be "fun-seekers", that is, to have more informal, mutually gratifying relationships with grandchildren, or to be "distant figures," in which cases contact was infrequent and irregular. In the research conducted by Robertson (1977), older grandmothers were more likely to have "individualized" roles. They had the highest frequency of contact with grandchildren and viewed grandparenting as a central part of their lives. Younger grandparents, who were more likely to fall into the "symbolic" role type, were more involved with other activities in their lives and were not as emphatic about the importance of grandparenting as were the older grandparents.

Silverstein and Long's (1998) study suggested that very old grandparents have reduced contact with adult grandchildren, although this is not necessarily accompanied by reduced feelings of emotional closeness. Silverstein and Long also found that contact might increase when grandparents have health problems, suggesting that adult grandchildren are important

sources of support to them. Holladay et al. (1998) suggest that the development of the grandparent-grandchild relationship is characterized by turning points. Young-adult granddaughters in their study reported that sharing activities with their grandmothers such as a trip or an extended vacation, experiencing an event such as death or illness in the family, or disagreeing over an important issue could affect the quality of the relationships.

A few researchers have distinguished the influence of life stage on grandparent-grandchild relationships from that of chronological age. Sprey and Matthews (1982) suggest that three significant life stages of grandchildren be taken into account when analyzing grandparent-grandchild interaction: the time when grandchildren are infants and small children, when grandchildren are in later childhood or are young teenagers, and when grandchildren are older teenagers and adults. The characteristics and needs of grandchildren, as well as those of grandparents, may be different at various stages of the life course (Barranti, 1985). During adolescence and young adulthood, for example, grandchildren may interact with grandparents less because they become absorbed in other relationships outside of the family (Roberto and Stroes, 1992). Hodgson's (1992) study, on the other hand, suggests that grandchildren may feel closer to their grandparents when they grow older and get to know their grandparents as adults.

Some researchers have suggested that persons respond differently to grandparenthood depending on whether their becoming grandparents is an "on-time" or "off-time" event. Hagestad and Burton (1986) describe grandparenthood as an "on-time" event when it occurs at an expected or predicted time in the grandparent's life. In Gee's (1991) Canadian study, the average "right age" to become grandmothers was 48 years. This differs, however, by social characteristics such as social class, race and ethnicity. For example, in the U.S., the transition to grandparenthood and great-grandparenthood occurs earlier for Blacks than for Whites (Szinovacz, 1998). When

grandparenthood occurs "on time," grandparents can count on friends and peers to be grandparents at the same time; they can compare experiences and offer support to one another. Conversely, when grandparenthood occurs "too early" or "too late," grandparents may not be as prepared for this role and may be less welcoming of this change in their lives. This situation may become particularly acute for grandparents who become primary caregivers for their grandchildren (see below) and who experience "role overload" as a result (Burton and Bengtson, 1985).

Marital Status and Employment Status

The association between grandparents' marital status and their relationships with grandchildren has received scant mention in the literature. We know little about whether and how relationships with grandchildren differ when grandparents are widowed as opposed to married. Nor do we know how divorce in the grandparent generation affects these relationships, although Kalish and Visher (1981) have noted that the number of divorces amongst grandparents is increasing. (Note that there is a sizeable body of literature on the impact of divorce in the middle generation on the grandparent-grandchild relationship; we discuss this in a later section.) In a study of grandmothers who were providing care to their grandchildren, Baydar and Brooks-Gunn (1998) found that grandmothers who were primary caregivers were more likely to be unmarried, while those who provided non-primary care were more likely to be married.

There is also a lack of information on how the grandparent role varies when grandparents are employed versus not employed. How is grandparenthood different when grandparents are retired, compared to when they are employed? Questions regarding grandmothers are particularly relevant. Given the increased labour force participation rates of women in the age categories in

which women are likely to be grandmothers (49.7% of women aged 55-60 and 27.9% of women aged 60-64 in 1991), a greater number of grandmothers are in the paid labour force than was the case in earlier decades; for example, in 1991, 71.8% of women aged 45-54 were in paid employment, compared to 55.9% in 1981 and 44.4% in 1971 (Rosenthal et al., in press). The impact that these changes may be having on the interaction between grandparents and grandchildren, however, is largely unknown.

Race and Ethnicity

Canadian data on the racial variability in grandparenting are not available. American data, however, are informative. In an analysis of grandparenting styles, Cherlin and Furstenberg (1985) found that a greater percentage of Black grandparents took active roles in the lives of their grandchildren than did Whites or other Nonwhites. While Cherlin and Furstenberg attributed part of these findings to a higher prevalence of single-parent families amongst Blacks, they also found that Black grandparents, and Black grandmothers in particular, had a significant role in two-parent families.

In another study, Ashton (1996) found that Black grandmothers were more comfortable asking their adult grandchildren for help with errands, advice, and financial assistance than were White grandmothers. She attributed these differences to the possibility that Black grandmothers are more likely to be in financial need and/or to the greater likelihood that they have had a parental relationship with their grandchildren (see below regarding custodial grandparenting).

Kivett's (1991) study suggests that being a grandparent has more centrality in the lives of older Black men than White men. Black grandfathers had more contact with grandchildren,

provided more assistance to them, and expected more help from them than did White grandfathers.

Cagney and Agree (1999) recently conducted a study examining racial differences in the utilization of health care services. They found that the presence of grandchildren decreased the risk of grandparents, especially Black grandparents, using home care services. Cagney and Agree suggested that this reduction may be due to older grandchildren acting as family caregivers.

The lack of research that directly examines grandparenthood as it varies among ethnic groups is rather surprising, given the ethnic heterogeneity that characterizes Canadian society. However, there is a parallel lack of research on ethnic differences in aging families. The grandparent experience will, of course, vary according to whether the grandparent is an immigrant or Canadian-born, as well as according to the cultural patterns of the country of origin and the degree of attachment of the grandparent and younger generations to their ethnocultural traditions. When investigating ethnic and/or racial differences in grandparenting, it is important to keep in mind that some differences may be due to cultural traditions while others may stem from socioeconomic differences and social inequality (Rosenthal, 1986). For example, extensive involvement of grandparents in child care may reflect economic need on the part of the adult child rather than a cultural role within a particular ethnic group; or, a combination of both cultural and economic factors may be involved. Another example might be three generation households. While it might be assumed that this living arrangement reflects a cultural preference, it may also be the case that multi-generational households are formed as a solution to economic problems, particularly when people are recent immigrants to Canada.

Grandparents' Relationships With Their Own Grandparents

Although there is relatively little research on how relationships with grandparents influence one's own grandparenting, one might speculate that good relationships are transmitted across generations. The question, then, is whether having had a positive (or negative) relationship with one's grandparents leads to a positive (or negative) relationship, years later, with one's grandchildren. King and Elder (1997) found that early involvement with grandparents, whether a positive or negative experience, can influence one's own style of grandparenting. Older persons who knew their grandparents were more likely to participate in activities with their grandchildren when they themselves became grandparents; they were more likely to provide instrumental assistance and were more likely to play the role of mentor and companion.

Kivnick (1982) found that a combination of gender and early childhood experiences led to different meanings of grandparenthood for women and men when they themselves become grandparents. Grandmothers who had felt positively towards their own grandparents when younger, were more likely to consider grandparenthood as having central importance in their own lives, as giving them the opportunity to act as a resource to their grandchildren, and as providing a way of reliving the past and recollecting their own grandparents. Grandfathers who held positive feelings towards their own grandparents, were more likely to view grandparenthood as an opportunity to "spoil" or indulge their grandchildren.

<u>How does health contribute to diversity in grandparent-grandchild relationships?</u>

There are some indications that the health status of grandparents affects the nature of their relationships with grandchildren. Kahana and Kahana (1971) refer to a study led by Kahana and Coe that found significant differences in frequency of contact with grandchildren amongst

grandparents living in the community as compared to those in long-term care facilities. They suggest that the opportunity for the older generation to be physically active in their grandparenting might have contributed to the greater frequency of contact between grandchildren and their grandparents who lived in the community.

Physical functioning may in fact be a more important indicator than health status per se. In a small Canadian study, Longo (1998) found that grandparents and adult children who felt emotionally close to each other, maintained this closeness following the grandparent's relocation to a long-term care facility. Grandparents who were physically, but not cognitively impaired, continued to provide emotional and, at times, financial support to their grandchildren.

How does the mediating role of adult children and children-in-law contribute to diversity in grandparent-grandchild relationships?

People become grandparents, not through their own direct efforts, but through the decision and reproduction of their children (Sprey and Matthews, 1982; Matthews and Sprey, 1984). Therefore, the link between grandparents and grandchildren is inherently indirect and sensitive to the influence of the middle generation. Indeed, several studies indicate that face-to-face contact might only take place in the presence of the parent generation, especially when grandchildren are younger. Wood and Robertson (1976) found that most activities between grandparents and grandchildren took place in the presence of the adult child, while Robertson (1975) reported that most interaction between grandparents and grandchildren was initiated by the parent or grandchild.

Grandparents may lose contact with grandchildren when tension arises between them and the middle generation. Kornhaber (1985) discussed how strained relationships between

grandparents and their adult children can lead to weakened bonds between grandparents and grandchildren. Several studies indicate that face-to-face contact between grandparents and grandchildren is affected by conflict between an adult child and child-in-law. Gladstone (1989), for example, found that if an adult child and child-in-law are engaged in an acrimonious marriage breakdown and if the custodial parent prevents their former partner from gaining access to their child, then the former partner's parent may be denied access to their grandchild as well.

While the mediating influence of the middle generation is greatest when grandchildren are younger, it usually diminishes when grandchildren become adolescents and decreases even more when grandchildren approach adulthood (Sprey and Matthews, 1982), at which time relationships are more likely to be voluntary than to be driven by family obligation (Roberto and Stroes, 1992). Still, the feeling that grandparents and older grandchildren have towards each other may be interwoven with the feelings that one or the other is perceived to have with the middle generation (Miller and Cavanaugh, 1990). Thompson and Walker (1987), for example, found a high correlation between the intimacy that grandmothers felt towards their young adult granddaughters and the intimacy they felt towards their daughters. Similarly, Matthews and Sprey (1985) found that adolescent grandchildren who evaluated the relationship between their parents and their parents' mothers as close were also close to their grandmothers. Moreover, while the relationship between fathers and their mothers-in-law did not appear to be important, the relationships between the adolescents' mothers and their mothers-in-law were associated with the grandchildren's feelings towards their grandmothers.

What is the impact of "default" and divorce in the middle generation on diversity in grandparent-grandchild relationships?

While grandparenting may be a voluntary role (Johnson, 1983), Sprey and Matthews (1982) have pointed out that certain situations affect the personal choices that grandparents make with regard to how they want to conduct themselves as grandparents. Two situations stand out among those that influence the choices grandparents may make about their roles: (1) situations in which parents "default" or cannot fulfill their roles as parents, and (2) situations involving divorce in the middle (adult child) generation. In each of these situations, grandparents may take on much more active roles towards their grandchildren.

Grandparents Who Parent Their Grandchildren

Since the 1980's there has been an increasing number of grandparents who have taken on a parental role towards their grandchildren. Since Canadian studies are lacking, we turn to U.S. research. Being single, living in poverty, and being an African-American increase the likelihood of grandparents becoming a primary caregiver for their grandchildren (Roe and Minkler, 1998-99). Pearson et al. (1997) found that the degree of involvement that grandmothers had in raising their grandchildren was related to the absence of a child in the household. A number of reasons have been cited for the increase in grandparent-headed households in the U.S. These include an increase in alcohol and drug abuse, divorce, teen pregnancy, incarcerated mothers and the AIDS epidemic. Roe and Minkler (1998-1999) note that many factors related to grandparents becoming primary caregivers are themselves related to the issue of poverty. In any event, grandparents become concerned about the ability of their children to meet the emotional and

physical needs of their grandchildren, and often become involved after being approached by their child or by a social service agency (Jendrek, 1994).

Grandparents who are primary caregivers may be faced with a number of challenges. Studies have reported higher rates of depression, health problems and fatigue amongst caregiving grandparents, compared to others their age. Social contacts may be curtailed, grandparents have less time for themselves, and economic pressures may increase as grandparents are forced to quit their jobs or reduce their hours in the labour force if they are in paid employment, or stretch their financial resources (Burton, 1992; Dressel and Barnhill, 1994; Emick and Hayslip, 1996; Jendrek, 1993; Minkler and Roe, 1996). Hayslip et al. (1998) found that custodial grandparents experience even more psychological distress when grandchildren exhibit emotional or behavioural problems.

Nevertheless, being a primary caregiver can also be rewarding. Grandparents have reported a sense of satisfaction that they can "be there" for their grandchildren and they gain a strong sense of purpose by being so actively involved in the lives of their grandchildren (Burton, 1992; Dressel and Barnhill, 1994; Jendrek, 1993; Roe and Minkler, 1998-1999). Various types of interventions have also been developed to support grandparents in their caregiving roles. These include individual counseling programs, educational and social support groups, and in the U.S., an information and resource centre (Minkler et al., 1993; Minkler and Roe, 1996; Roe and Minkler, 1998-1999).

Marriage Breakdown in the Middle Generation

The dissolution of an adult child's marriage can have an important impact on grandparent-grandchild relationships. Many grandparents see their grandchildren less often after

a separation or divorce when their adult child does not have custody of the grandchild (Johnson, 1983; Matthews and Sprey, 1984). Custodial status of the adult child has in fact been found to be a more important factor influencing grandparent-grandchild contact than gender (Matthews and Sprey, 1984) though the two are usually correlated since daughters are more likely than sons to have custody of grandchildren. Grandparents who are geographically distant have also been found to have less contact with grandchildren following an adult child's marriage breakdown (Cherlin and Furstenberg, 1985, 1986; Gladstone, 1988). On the other hand, contact between grandparents and young grandchildren often increases following a child's separation or divorce, especially when grandparents live close to their grandchildren, when the adult child is the custodial parent, and when grandparents retain friendly relationships with a custodial child-in-law (Gladstone, 1988, 1989; Johnson and Barer, 1987; Matthews and Sprey, 1984).

Grandparents remain important resources to their grandchildren and in fact may increase the amount of support provided to grandchildren following a child's marriage breakdown. Especially significant is the personal advice and reassurance given to young grandchildren who are emotionally vulnerable at this time (Gladstone, 1988). Grandparents may also be resources to their adult children, which in turn may benefit their grandchildren or result in greater contact with grandchildren. Aldous (1985) found that older parents in her study were more likely to provide support to their divorced daughters who had children than they were to their married daughters or sons with or without children. In a Canadian study by Gladstone (1987), grandmothers who provided child-care services to their custodial daughters who wanted to enter or return to the labour force, saw more of their grandchildren as a result. Meanwhile, non-custodial sons who had their children for the day, often brought the grandchildren to the grandparent's home where there was greater space or opportunity to socialize. As a result,

grandparents were able to visit with their grandchildren as well, and in some cases, ended up seeing the grandchildren more often than they had before their adult child's marriage breakdown.

EXPECTATIONS AND RIGHTS OF GRANDPARENTS

It is difficult to identify clear expectations surrounding grandparenthood since the role of grandparents in the family has few normative guides; that is, society has provided grandparents with few guidelines as to how to position themselves in various family situations. As pointed out by Strom and Strom (1997), there are few books or courses available to help grandparents develop a sense of competency in their role. Grandparents are expected not to interfere with the parenting responsibilities of their adult children (Wood and Robertson, 1976). Indeed, Gladstone (1988) found that grandparents are clearer about behaviours that they should avoid than they are about those that they should engage in. Gladstone asked grandparents, whose adult child had separated or divorced, what advice they would give to other grandparents. Prescriptive behaviour - what grandparents should "do" - was fairly general: "give support", "be there", "remain loving." In contrast, proscriptive behaviour - what grandparents should "not do" - was more specific: "don't interfere", "don't take sides", "don't give advice."

Due to the ambiguity surrounding the grandparenting role, scholars have suggested that grandparents must negotiate their relationships with grandchildren and that this process often involves children and children-in-law (Hagestad, 1981; Sprey and Matthews, 1982; Johnson, 1983). This latter point recognizes once again the possibility that adult children and their spouses can mediate grandparents' interaction with their grandchildren. Sprey and Matthews (1982) make an insightful comment with respect to the need for grandparents to negotiate their roles with a middle generation who influence grandparent-grandchild relationships. They

suggest that the process of negotiating and defining the role of grandparent actually involves two significant steps. The birth of the first grandchild is, in fact, the second step. This is preceded by the entrance of the in-law child into the family and the role relationship that is defined between the older parent (the grandparent-to-be) and the new in-law child, that is, whether or not they "get off on the right foot,"

The complexities of negotiation in the absence of clear and widely shared expectations may be illustrated by focusing for a moment on the issue of help and advice from grandparents. While adult children might want help from grandparents, and grandparents might want to help and be involved with their grandchildren, the generations may differ on the amount and nature of help. Grandparents may want to help out, but there may be a fine line between feeling useful and feeling exploited or pressured into helping out more than they prefer. Norris and Tindale (1994:69) suggest, "In spite of this apparent need for help with child rearing, there appear to be feelings of ambivalence attached to actual acceptance of advice from grandparents." Although there is some limited evidence that such feelings vary by ethnicity and culture, "white, middle-class mothers hold strongly negative attitudes about 'interference' in their child-rearing activities" (Norris and Tindale, 1994:69; see also: Kennedy, 1990; Thomas, 1990). Both the grandparent and the parent generation recognize a general cultural belief that grandparents are not supposed to interfere in the lives of their children and grandchildren. Grandparents do not want to be seen as meddling (Norris and Tindale, 1994:69). Trying to observe this norm of non-interference, while at the same time meeting children's expectations for assistance, places grandparents in what Thomas (1990) describes as a "double bind," in which it is almost "impossible" to do the "right" thing. Perhaps "impossible" is too strong a word, but certainly this is an area where negotiation can be delicate.

The issue of grandparent rights is becoming more prominent in both Canada and the U.S. Important work has been started in the U.S. concerning the rights of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Professional and grass-roots organizations have been engaged in advocacy at both the state and national levels. Policy issues that need to be addressed include the provision of legal decision-making status and financial support to grandparents who, in a de facto sense, are parenting their grandchildren (Minkler and Roe, 1996; Roe and Minkler, 1998-1999). These grandparents face difficulties in obtaining financial assistance, health insurance coverage, and housing, as well as problems in gaining legal rights to make decisions about the child's education and health care (Chalfie, 1994).

The rights of grandparents to have contact with grandchildren has also emerged as an issue when grandparents are denied access by their children or children-in-law. These situations are invariably surrounded by family conflict and often occur following an adult child's marriage breakdown (Gladstone, 1987), remarriage (Gladstone, 1991), or death (Derdeyn, 1985). Grandparents who lose contact with their grandchildren often experience a profound sense of loss and grief (Kruk, 1995). In Canada, several advocacy and self-help groups have been formed, including the GRAND (Grandparents Requesting Access and Dignity) Society, the Canadian Grandparent Rights Association and Orphaned Grandparents. While some grandparents who have access difficulties try to regain contact with grandchildren through the legal system, others believe that this route is not productive (Derdeyn, 1985) and that a more successful route is through family mediation (Kruk, 1995), Wilson and DeShane (1982) have posited that the ambiguous status of grandparents in the family has contributed to their ambiguous legal standing regarding access to their grandchildren.

CONCLUSION

Our review of the literature on grandparenthood has led us to three central conclusions: that grandparenthood is characterized by diversity, by complexity, and by change.

Grandparenthood is a very diverse experience. Grandparents associate different types of subjective meanings and significance to their being grandparents. Patterns of contact, exchanges of support, and feelings of emotional closeness towards grandchildren are varied. Furthermore, this diversity is not only found between groups of grandparents, but can be seen in the relationships that an individual grandparent might have with her or his various grandchildren. This diversity becomes even more apparent when grandparenthood is viewed in different physical and social contexts. Factors that are associated with the ways in which grandparents perceive their grandparenthood, as well as with activities that are engaged in and feelings of emotional closeness, include the geographic distance between grandparent and grandchild, the grandparent's gender, lifestage, marital and employment status, and race and ethnicity. Grandparenthood is anything but a uniform set of experiences.

Being a grandparent is a complex social role that embraces a host of other connected relationships. Since grandparents, by definition, cannot exist in their role without grandchildren, we need to view the role as an interactive process, as well as in personal terms. We also need to consider the mediating position that adult children, children-in-law, spouses, partners, and other family members might have in defining the shape that grandparenting takes, especially in the early years. Grandparenthood, in short, needs to be thought of as more than a dyadic relationships, for it is often a reflection of negotiated relationships that occur within a larger family system.

The nature of the grandparent-grandchild relationship is subject to change over time. As grandparents and grandchildren move through the life course, the way that they see each other, as well as the way that they see themselves in their relationship with one another may change. Family or personal crises can also have an impact on the needs or expectations grandparents and grandchildren may have of each other. It may be important, therefore, to think of dimensions of grandparenting – the subjective meanings, patterns of contact and support, and feelings of emotional closeness – as lying on a continuum and being subject to shift in more than one direction as the events that occur over time present themselves.

While a substantial body of research literature sheds light on many aspects of grandparenthood, there are many gaps in our current knowledge. We now discuss some of these gaps, although this is by no means an exhaustive list.

We have emphasized that grandparenthood is a diverse experience.We have tried to identify the ways in which it varies and some of the factors that lead to this diversity. The research literature is limited, however, in the extent to which it enables us to fully grasp this diversity. For example, while we know from our own everyday experience that one grandparent may have diverse relationships with his or her several grandchildren, little attention has been given to studying this (Marshall et al., 1993). Another gap in the research literature that we noted was the lack of research on how grandparenthood differs among ethnic groups.

A second point we have emphasized is that the grandparent role is characterized by complexity. In a sense it is more complex than being a parent because it involves more people (adult children and children-in-law, as well as another set of grandparents) and the expectations about grandparents' roles are less clear. The lack of clear expectations is not necessarily negative, since it enables individuals to negotiate roles and relationships within a wide range of

possibilities. At the same time, however, individuals may often feel they are trying to sail in uncharted waters. Despite the substantial body of research on grandparents, we have relatively little research on how the role is negotiated, and we have almost no studies that somehow capture these negotiations in the context of all the players, including the "other set" of grandparents.

The complexity of family life has deepened as divorce and remarriage have become fairly common features of Canadian families. While we have some facts and figures on step-grandparenthood, in truth we know very little about this phenomenon.

Another change in family structure has been the trend to having children outside the bounds of legal marriage. This trend has been most common in Quebec where fully half the children born are born to parents who are not legally married, but is fairly common in other parts of Canada as well. What implications -- legal, as well as social -- does this trend have for the experience of grandparenthood? Is being a "common-law grandparent" different in any way from the more traditional grandparenthood experience?

The research literature on grandparenting, although thorough and comprehensive in many respects, fails to capture the tension that is a feature of most family life. This is a failing found in almost all social research on families, not just on grandparents. Marshall, Matthews and Rosenthal (1993) refer to this as the "elusiveness of family life". Research tends to provide a relatively harmonious, positive portrait of grandparenthood or, at the other extreme, to focus on problem situations such as access difficulties faced by grandparents after a middle-generation divorce. This might be characterized as a "love-hate" relationship with the family, as far as research approaches go (Marshall et al., 1993).

Absent from the literature on grandparenting is attention to family rituals and the important role grandparents play in these, as well as the satisfaction they might gain from them.

Much of the work on the meaning of grandparenthood was done two to three decades ago. What remains to be explored is the way in which personal meanings of grandparenthood are related to meaning systems in the family as a whole. Family rituals play an important part in maintaining and transmitting family culture from one generation to the next, and grandparents are often key figures in these rituals.

Relationships between grandparents and grandchildren occur within a complex and dynamic system of family relationships and are fostered or constrained by these relationships. We will gain a better understanding of grandparenthood when research is able to move beyond a focus on the individual, or a two-person relationship, and examine families as a whole. This is a very challenging task, and one that has not been met in the broader study of families. Nonetheless, moving to this level is a primary challenge in moving our understanding of grandparenthood forward.

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